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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ Cyber Cops On Patrol! ~ People Are Talking! ~ Can-Spam Failing!
~ Google's Froogle Mess! ~ Spam Hits Record High! ~ Troll Newsreader!
~ CT60 Flash Released! ~ 2004 ACEC Atari Swap! ~ Nintendo Revolution
~ Does Web Need Policing ~ New Faster Power Mac G5 ~ Critics Hail PSP!

-* Oracle Antitrust Case Starts *-
-* BT Seeks To Block Child Porn Access *-
-* Microsoft Files Eight Suits Against Spam! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Well, it's been a mixed-bag of weather this past week. Don't ask me why I'm so obsessed with reporting the weather conditions for this area; I guess it's because it can be so interesting here in New England. And, because it usually is the determining factor for a lot of what we tend to do in this part of the country, during the appropriate seasons.

I have an interesting story to relate to you this week. I guess we really don't realize just how small the world is these days due to the tremendous reach of the internet. Just as the telephone has allowed us to talk with anyone in the world, the internet allows the same, and more. I exchange e-mail with my father quite frequently (when he doesn't "lose" his messages to me somehow!). We discuss a number of things; and naturally, messages occasionally have content pertaining to my brother and sister, as well as other relatives.

I remember a few months ago, he mentioned that my brother happened to be exchanging e-mail and instant messaging someone in China - a female. I also remember that at least once, my father forwarded a picture of the woman to me that my brother had forwarded. I thought little of it since it's not surprising to me that my brother would talk to just about anyone of the opposite sex, thinking of himself as the ultimate ladies man. Well, about a month ago, I get an e-mail from my father saying that this young woman extended an invitation to my brother to visit her and her family in China. And he decides that he's going to go! At about this time, I'm trying to figure out what in tarnation could my brother be thinking! I was still not sure that he was being serious until subsequent messages relate to me my brother's progress (or lack of it) getting a passport, visa, etc. In fact, although he had booked a flight, it wasn't until the day before he was supposed to leave that the final paperwork approving his visit was provided.

So, to make a long story short, he's currently in China (probably set to return in the next day or so after spending two weeks there). And, he's now married! Yep, the world is not as large as it used to be.

Until next time...

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Troll beta 3

Bonjour :)

Reminder : Troll for Atari is a next generation newsreader.
You can now send posts with it.

Download on my homepage or directly on
http://rajah.atari.org/files/ -> trollb3_uk.zip (100 Ko)

New features:
- Bugfixes for:
  - lack of file closing (message saving).
  - WORK and CACHE folder not found if on the top of the HD partition.
  - infinite loop = freeze when a post cannot be downloaded (headline is listed, but the message has been deleted on the server).
  - random crash on headlines downloading (moreover if the newsgroup subscription is very new). Careful, problems may remain.
+ Display option: message can be masked if rejected by the filters.
+ New subject or message reply.
+ Awaiting messages (to be sent) management.
+ iso-8859-1 conversion while sending
+ Internal text editor (in the message window)
+ Possibility to call an external text editor
+ Clipboard management for the message window (copy only if newsgroup reading).

Please report any bug you find, and suggestions you'd like to have.

Regards

-- Pierre TONTHAT - Rajah Lone / Renaissance
http://rajah.atari.org

CT60 Flash v1.01c Released

Didier MØquignon has released a new version of the CT60 Flash/TOS/Firmware.

This update is particularly important for people with a CT60 of the latest model, as there has been a change of the flash device in many of the new cards. A 32MHz external videl-sync problem has also been corrected.

http://ct60conf.atari.org/

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!

2004 ACEC Atari Swap Meet

Greetings fellow Atarians and/or those generally interested in computers and electronics.

The Atari Computer Enthusiasts of Columbus, Ohio, wish to announce their 2004 swap and sale.

Date: Saturday, September 11, September 11, September 11, 2004, 2004, 2004, 2004, 2004!!!! (these announcements for the past X years all look alike so I want to emphasis the year)

Place: the same as it has been (mapquest to: 980 Lenore St., Columbus, Ohio -- Oakland Park Community Center. A bmp scan of the map is available if you have a fast connection or can deal with zip).

Time: 9 am to 3 pm, EDT

Non-inflationary Price: $6 for a table which includes admission for one, $4 for single admission, maximum of $8 for family admission.

What to buy/sell: Though generally anything Atari and Atari-related, we absolutely welcome other game systems, computers, electronics, software, etc. Anything geeks like us might find interesting.

ACEC has dropped massive mailing campaigns due to cost. Therefore, please help the cause and get the word out: post everywhere of which you know, e-mail your friends, etc. Also, if you wish, let me know of physical and e-mailing addresses for almost-certain attendees. [I still snail-mail those who have given me recent addresses.] In a similar vein, let me know if you want OFF my mailing lists.

See ACEC’s web page at:

http://www.angelfire.com/oh4/acec/acec.html

(oddly, this link saved to Favorites seems to work only through IE, not through my SlimBrowser)

Sad news to the community: I regret to announce we lost a long-time member Dick Albright this past year. I thought some of you might wish to know. Our best wishes to his family.

Best to all,
Wayne

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. There have been a couple of sad pieces of news this past week.

Of course the most widely covered piece of bad news is the passing of Ronald Reagan. I must admit that his passing affected me more than I thought it would. I was never an admirer, and I disagreed with just about everything he did. But anyone dealing with Alzheimer's disease can tell you that it's a horrible, horrible thing. My heart really does go out to both he and his family. I've had only a marginal brush with it (my wife's grandmother died of it), but I would do just about anything to avoid having to deal with it again.

I find the revisionism going on at the moment to be quite interesting. While I really did disagree with almost every opinion the man had during his eight years in office, I won't go into details because you've very probably got your own opinions, and I have no interest in changing anyone's mind. But while I was almost always in opposition to him, I've got to hand it to him for one thing... he knew how to work a crowd. Be it a $500-a-plate fundraiser or a nationally televised speech, he knew just which button to push. Whether browbeating someone who disagreed with him or making believe that he couldn't hear a question... or getting that hurt look when he couldn't get away with making believe that he couldn't hear it... he knew how to make that magical contact with his intended audience.

He also knew one other very important thing. He understood that, above and beyond economics, past disheartening employment figures or upwardly spiraling interest rates, every american... every person... wants to feel proud.

I remember a 'post-game interview' with Geraldine Ferraro, who ran for Vice President with Walter Mondale. She had given a speech to a crowd of blue collar workers and met with a very cool reception. Pro-Reagan signs and shouts were anything but rare during her oration. After the speech, she cornered one of the participants and asked why a crowd of blue collar workers would be pro-Reagan. 'With high unemployment and interest rates and a ballooning deficit, why... just WHY?"

"Because," the worker answered, "at least now we're proud again".

And for that insight into human nature, that flash of understanding, the "anti-elite elite" now wants to plaster his likeness on everything from Mount Rushmore to the ten and twenty dollar bills.

The second event causes me more personal pain. Ray Charles, 'The Genius', has passed away. I don't know who gave him that handle, when or why, but it was the perfect monicker for him. By all accounts an all-around good guy, Ray Charles simply WAS music. I don't know if it was reality or my imagination, but he never seemed to take himself all that seriously. It was the music that was important... and those who enjoyed listening to it. I wish we could bottle that and give it out at the upcoming convention in New York.

Hey, I've got an idea... Let's put RAY CHARLES on Mount Rushmore!

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
==========

Eduard Werner asks for help configuring STiNG:

"I'm trying to configure my STFM for plip. I've installed sting and the plip-module, everything seems to load ok, the drivers are found by other programs (ping.prg, for example). My only problem is: How do I configure the IP address? On my linux box I'll do sth like

ifconfig plip0 <myaddress> pointopoint <atari-address>

but what's the equivalent on the ST? Furthermore, the sting documentation shows nice control panels, where are they??"

Jim DeClercq tells Eduard:

"Those missing control panels are .CPX files, which go where xcontrol.prg can find them."

Eduard replies:

"I have tos 1.4.

I have found xcontrol.acc somewhere and installed it. Now I can set up the ip address, it gets saved into sting.prt in the root of the drive. I set the ip address of "Centr. PLIP" to 192.168.1.2 in the cpx module and routed "Centr. PLIP" to 192.168.1.1 in route.tab (the plip0 of my linux box). Hmmm. ping doesn't find anything on my atari, neither ping 127.0.0.1, nor 192.168.1.2 (forget about the other box) What am I missing?"

Brian Roland adds:

"Start like this on the atari.

0.0.0.0   0.0.0.0   plip(whatever the driver's name is)   0.0.0.0

Comment out everything else in the route tab. This way we KNOW all tcp/ip data is going to that plip port.

Provided you have STing running, The Main CPX, the port CPX, and the Protocols CPX, whatever comes and goes from STing will use that port now.

Unless you intend to use one of the Atari's other ports networked to yet another machine....just leave that default route in play...it's all you need.

Don't forget to put an 'arp' entry in your linux box.so it doesn't trash strange packets or just push them out the front door (to the internet or wherever) over some other port (such as ethernet). I'm not sure how, but you do have to tell linux that there will be icp/ip packets coming and going from LPT?.

First try to ping the Atari from linux.

Once you get that working, go to linux and configure the route tab there for your Atari's IP I.E.

192.168.1.2   255.255.255.0   plip0   0.0.0.0

This way linux is now masquerading, and you can ping from Atari, and otherwise get to the rest of your network/internet using the Atari."

Eduard replies:

"Tried that before. (BTW, plip is the only connection I want to use.) Tried just again. Same result. (See below.)

You don't do that [arp] manually. You just issue sth like

ifconfig plip0 <linux-ip> pointopoint <other-ip>

and the necessary routing information gets added automagically on a decently recent installation (checked that, too, of course). But the linux box is ok, routing table looks good, and ping, telnet etc. to its own plip address (192.168.1.1) works.

Neither ping 127.0.0.1 nor ping 192.168.1.2 (the assigned ip address) works so there's definitely sth amiss on the atari side.

First both machines should be able to see themselves, shouldn't they. Then, when we know the local setup is working, the connection between them gets interesting."

Brian tells Eduard:

"Agreed...
I jumped into the thread late and thought that much was working.
If STing can't even ping itself something's missing.

Check that all the proper CPX are enabled. Make sure they are 'active' (a little check box in main STing CPX and Ports CPX). Double check you've the latest TCP/IP protocols CPX and STX(1.40), and check your settings. If you have any other ports installed, remove them all but the plip for now (move the stx driver to a hide folder, or rename driver st?). Make double sure you've not installed/enabled the masquerade STX, as that remaps the ip scheme quite a bit."

Eduard messes around with a few things and tells Brian:

"I have 1.2 [CPX version]. Where do I find I.4? And does it work with TOS 1.4?

Ah, that did the trick. I've thrown out masque.stx and now the Atari can ping itself both on 127.0.0.1 and 192.168.1.2. I'll check the rest tomorrow, that is, today after some hours sleep. Thanks for your help. Now I'm only lacking an NFS client for TOS ..."

Brian tells Eduard:

"Yes [they are compatible with TOS 1.4]. Try here:
http://www.ettnet.se/~dlanor/sting/html/index.htm

I recommend that you study that page well. Various bits of STing get updated from the distribution archive.

Sorry, there are no nfs drivers for straight TOS. Only Mint. Getting it to run on a 4meg or less 68000 machine? Good luck

There are FTP and HTTP servers for STing. B_NET allows TOS machines to mount networked drives to the desktop. This might be an option if you run an Atari emulator on the linux box.

Using AFTP as a client on the Atari end is the next best thing to nfs. It has a nice drag and drop GEM interface that one can almost treat as a 'disk drive' on the desk top.

Lately I've moved to gaFTP (A TOS/TTP command line based client) and here's why.

For FASTER ftp connections, I recommend using gaFTP on the Atari. For reasons unknown to me, it's 10 times faster transferring files than AFTP. Another neat thing about this program is that you can make little FTP batch files for things you do often and just double click them and vrooom....all done.

An Example:
I have a script that backs up (appends) new/changed files on the entire system into a zip file.

Next it calls gaftp and passes it this script: BACKUP.FTP

```
open mypc
login name
password
lcd "E:\USR\ROOT\BACKUPS"
cd "D:\Atari Tank"
binary
put "Falcon Backup.zip"
bye
```

You can also set up your desktop so that double clicking these scripts launches gaFTP and it does it's thing. Here's an example of one to simply connect to a favorite FTP site, move both local and remote directories to those I'll be using and wait for my manual input.

```
open mypc
login name
password
cd "C:\My Music"
lcd "D:\USR\BJR\My Music"
binary                                "
```

Brian now asks for help with his Falcon:

"I'm having all sorts of fits with my Falcon CT2b lately.
Latest Flash bios I can find (1.39 I believe).

HDDriver 7.93

As clean a setup as possible for booting and testing.

In any extended resolution, using CentScreen or Videlity, under any OS I happen to try (MagiC/Mint/Geneva/TOS), the system will boot and run seemingly fine for 15 minutes or so, then I start getting 68000 exception errors, then either a freeze, bombs, or BUS error message. Eventually, the machine refuses to even boot in extended resolutions as the machine warms up.

My target resolution is 800X608X256 using the 32mhz clock.
Till recently, I'd been running it like this for a while now with only occasional lock-ups.

I should add that I've experimented with several resolutions, using all three clocks (32mhz, 50mhz, and 25mhz). It would seem that ANY RESOLUTION I try using Centscreen or Videlity to lock in leads to problems.

If I stick to the built in resolutions...not using Centscreen or Videlity, then I get a stable and fast machine that's really hard to crash.

Any ideas what might cause this?

Has anyone tried putting a heat-sink on the videl or has that anything at all to do with it? Would I be wasting time and money to install some kind of fancy cooling system with a CT2b?

I don't recall it ever being this bad. Have checked for the obvious bad connections, opened the case, and have a fan blowing over the entire mb."

John Smith tells Brian:

"Well, before you get a cooling system try working with the machine with no cover - just motherboard in the open air. I have heatsink and fan on Videl and DSP as well as small self-adhesive heatsinks on SDMA and two additional fans which blow the warm air out of the Falcon's case...

If machine locks without cover on then there is no cooling system which could help, I guess..."

Mark Bedingfield adds:

"I did find a bug in Centscreen that caused it to lock up on boot, if the NVram setting on my CT2 was set to an ST res (ST High), it locked up every time. I set the NV to 640x480x16 colours and it cured it. I don't think this is causing you any problems by the sound of it, but thought you might like to know."

Brian replies:

"Interesting you mention this little bit of TOS 7 boot modes.
More on this in a moment.

I think I got the CT2 stable again.

1. I warmed all the solder connections on the mb to reseat them.
2. Cleaned and reseated the ribbon cable connector.
3. Reflashed the BIOS (just incase some static or something got into Flash ram and set/unset a nibble.
4. Changed fans.

Between these four tackles, I think one, or a combination of them ironed things out. Time will tell for more certain.

Back to the TOS 7 boot options.
I've noticed a cursor bug when booting into my EasyMint setup.
As Mint does its boot up, I see a cursor at some points (it blazes past pretty fast), and by the end of init, the cursor is missing. Giving the \033e code doesn't bring the cursor back either.

By the way, booting in 16mhz or 50mhz TOS 4 mode, and the cursor is there.

The guys on the Mint mailing list say it is a NVDI 5 bug.

Back to TOS 7 mode.

I boot to the mint console without NVDI, and sure enough, the cursor is always there.

Now, here's the interesting part....
Sometimes (but not always), if the CT2b boot colors are changed to 4 color mode, the screen goes black text on white back ground (instead of yellow on blue if cntsrn is disabled) and the cursor usually shows up like it should. This almost always works if the stored setting is 640 X 480 X 2 when the machine is powered on, then change the 2 to 4; however, when 4 color mode is SAVED, I only get the cursor once out of a dozen boots or so.

I also tried the other color settings...same deal as far as the cursor goes...the catch is that some strange pixel stuff happens on bootup.

I very rarely ever see a cursor when booting in 2 color mode. Every now and then it's there on boot...but 99% of the time it's not.

All this makes me wonder about that silly 'nvdi bug', and if some kind of patch can't be written to bring the cursor back %100. What's going on anyway? A console without a cursor is very much a headache. It'd really be nice to be able to use the console for tweaks and changes with vi or pico before going into an AES. Would also like to do more compiling and such straight from the console rather than via TOSWIN.

It would also be interesting to know if there are little apps that can change the cursor type - blink rate, etc...of the NVDI vt52 screen.
Given the knowledge of the VDI, such apps should be small, quick, and easy to do. Anyone?"

Rodolphe Czuba adds:

"Be careful to use the last version of CENTscreen !!
AND place it correctly in the auto folder !!
There is an order to follow (see the documentation !), especially with NVDI..

Videl [doesn’t] need a heatsink..."

Brian tells Rodolphe:

"Okay, checked versions and I’m at the latest (from the CT2.ZIP archive on your website). Checked auto folder order. I still get a fairly stable Turbo mode if I DO NOT use any extended resolution. Anything outside the normal Falcon video modes and the machine boots, runs a few minutes and either locks solid, or begins sporadic errors (nothing duplicable or the same each session...all different types of errors...most commonly 68000 exception).

For now lets look at a MagiC 6.01 session.
Only critical auto apps/accs in play.
Launching order as directed.

I’ve noticed that here lately, even on what seems a stable session, ST-ZIP complains of bad CRC in archives that I know are just fine. Boot in TOS 4 Turbo mode, or with CT2b off, and the archive unpacks just fine.

I still ’suspect’ overheating, but not positive. The fan on the CT2b is working, the top is off, and I have other larger fans blowing over the mother board.

I visually checked the connections from the wires...they ’look’ fine. If there is a ’particular’ connection I should double check, please let me know."

¯ ukasz Ma¯ ko asks for help with his Mega2:

"I’ve recently bought a Mega 2 ST and SH205 hard disk. Everything worked fine until today. I’ve tried to make terradesk run during startup, so I’ve put it and some of its files (maybe not all required) to c:\auto\ folder. After reboot the computer reads AHDI driver, reads something and then reboots. And it is like this forever. I’ve managed to notice 2 bombs just a fraction of a second before reboot.

Can anyone help me with this problem? Is there a way to boot bypassing files stored in AUTO directory completely? I know, that I can press Alternate during startup to avoid booting from disk. But then the hard disk driver is not loaded and I have no access to my partitions. Unfortunately, I’ve noticed that in such case the computer somehow isn’t booted from the floppy too. What can I do in this case?"

Brian Roland tells ¯ ukasz:

"First try holding various keys and combinations while booting.
It’s been a long time since I’ve used those drivers, but I’m thinking there is a way to boot the HD but skip the auto folder. Try things like ctrl. alt + ctrl. shift, and so on. You might stumble upon a combination that works.

Otherwise...I assume your disk drivers are AHDI. If supra, ICD, or something else the following still applies, just substitute the driver in question to the auto folder of a floppy.

Find your HD utility disk on floppy. If you don’t have one, make one. You can find the latest Atari Hard Disk (AHDI) drivers at most Atari FTP sites. Put the ahdi.prg in the auto folder of a floppy. Insert the floppy. Boot holding alt.

If for some reason the ahdi.prg doesn’t from from the auto folder on the floppy...no big deal, just open it and double click it. The utility will run and mount the drives.

Next you’ll have to use the desktop ’install drive’ to add at least the C drive disk icon to the desktop. Be sure to type the capital C for the device name (small c means cartridge port).

Now go into auto folder and move Tara desk and all its files a folder of its own.

Reread the instructions <grin>

To have Taradesk auto install on a Mega ST with TOS 1.2 you should tell the desktop to launch it. I’m not sure which is the earliest TOS that supports this auto start feature, but it is done with a line in the DESKTOP.INF file if yours supports it. If not, you use a little application called startgem.prg or similar in the auto-folder."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Critics Hail Sony PSP!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Nintendo Develops "Revolution"!
                                     ’Half-Life’ Arrests Made!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Game Critics Hail Sony PSP Device, Donkey Kong

Video game critics on Tuesday honored Sony Corp.’s upcoming handheld game device, the PlayStation Portable, and the latest iteration of the legendary

"Donkey Kong" franchise as products likely to bring gaming back to players who have turned away from the joystick.

The critics voted Sony's sleek mobile gaming device, the PSP, set to hit stores early next year, as "Best in Show" at the 2004 Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) in Los Angeles, the industry's major trade show.

"Sony did really well to age-up its audience, (and to) appeal to people over 18," said Geoff Keighley, co-chairman of the Game Critics Awards. "PSPs will be as hip as iPods for people in their 20s and 30s who haven't experienced portable gaming."

Keighley said critics, from 35 publications that review games, felt special admiration this year for products that appealed to what is believed to be the new frontier in gaming - grown-ups.

"I think companies have realized they can get great sales when they have products that don't feel like they were made for adolescents," he said.

On the other hand, the critics chose Nintendo Co. Ltd's "brilliantly simple" title "Donkey Kong Jungle Beat" - played on a set of bongo drums that control the titular ape - as the show's best original game.

Critics called the game a "gateway drug" that would pull millions of players back to Nintendo, originator of the 1981 "Donkey Kong" game featuring a barrel-hopping ape, a plumber and a damsel in distress.

The world's largest video game publisher, Electronic Arts Inc. took away five critics' awards from E3 - more than any other publisher - after being much nominated but overlooked last year.

EA won acclaim for "The Sims 2," "Def Jam: Fight for New York," "Burnout 3," "Madden NFL 2005," and "Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle Earth."

"Their biggest challenge is getting critical acclaim for their games that sell really well but don't get recognized," Keighley said. "They are starting to deliver on what gamers want in a way they haven't before."

The most critically celebrated games were Microsoft Corp.'s "Halo 2" and Ubisoft Montreal's "Splinter Cell 3," each sweeping three categories.

Keighley predicted that the release of "Halo 2," an alien invasion follow-up to the game that launched the Xbox would rival that of Take-Two Interactive Software Inc.'s "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas," due out in October.

"It's really going to be quite huge," he said.

Activision Inc., with six nominations, and Vivendi Universal Games, with five nominations, were shut out in the final awards.

Nintendo Develops New Home Game Console

Nintendo Co., which dominates the portable video-game machine market, said Wednesday it is developing a new home game console code-named "Revolution" in an apparent attempt to catch up with rival Sony Corp., which makes the PlayStation 2 console.

Nintendo president Satoru Iwata refused to give details, saying he feared competitors will steal the plan, but said a prototype, which will be shown next year, will deliver "new ideas" for entertainment and won't be merely a more powerful version of its current Game Cube machine.

Iwata reiterated his view that Nintendo should not follow the strategy of Sony, which is working on a more powerful chip to drive its next home game machine.

He said the gaming industry is reaching a dead end as its past formula for success - dazzling consumers with more sophisticated imagery - no longer works. Game sales have been declining for years in Japan, and growth has been slowing even in the more solid U.S. market, he said.

"What we need is not a next-generation machine but a next-generation way of playing games," Iwata told reporters at a Tokyo hotel. "We need to propose a new idea so that the game industry can overcome its current crisis."

Global sales of the Nintendo Game Cube at 15 million lag behind Sony's PlayStation 2, which dominates the home console market with more than 71 million sold worldwide. U.S. software giant Microsoft Corp. had sold nearly 14 million of its Xbox consoles worldwide as of the end of last year.

Nintendo, the Kyoto-based manufacturer behind the Super Mario and Pokemon games, is also facing competition from Sony in handheld game machines, a market Nintendo dominates with its Game Boy Advance.

Sony says it will start selling a portable version of its PlayStation machine later this year in Japan and overseas at a later date.

To counter that threat, Nintendo is planning a new portable game machine for later this year in the United States and Japan. The Nintendo DS, which stands for "dual screen," adds a new twist to its handheld GameBoy Advance by having two color liquid-crystal displays.

That allows players to see a close-up on one monitor and an overall map on the other in some games, or use one as a touch-panel to turn or move figures in other games, as well as relay scribbled messages to another player through a wireless connection.

"Double screens and touch panels are not new technologies," Iwata said. "The idea of using them for a game machine is new."

Takashi Oka, an analyst at UFJ Tsubasa Securities Co. in Tokyo, said Nintendo will likely hold up against the threat from Sony's offerings because of its ability to come up with appealing game software. Sony's PlayStation Portable, nicknamed PSP, will also probably be mostly used to watch video instead of playing games, he said.

"Nintendo's power in creating game software is still going strong," Oka said. "I don't consider the PSP as a game machine so its arrival won't affect Nintendo."

Arrests Made in 'Half-Life' Game Hacking Case

Arrests have been made in the theft last year of source code for Valve Software's highly anticipated PC game "Half-Life 2," an FBI spokesman in Seattle said on Thursday.

Details about the arrests, which were made in several countries, were not made public because they are part of an ongoing investigation, FBI spokesman Ray Lauer said.

Valve officials said the online gaming community tracked down the purported hackers within days of the company's announcement last fall that the release of "Half-Life 2" would be delayed because of the Internet break-in.

The hackers stole the source code and distributed portions online in one of the worst data thefts to hit the video game industry, prompting fans to pledge their help.

"It was extraordinary to watch how quickly and how cleverly gamers were able to unravel what are traditionally unsolvable problems for law enforcement related to this kind of cyber crime," Valve Chief Executive Gabe Newell said in a statement.

Newell said Valve has been working with law enforcement authorities in various nations to prepare cases against the accused code thieves. It was not clear when the arrests were made.

"Half-Life," one of the most popular games ever, stars hunky scientist Gordon Freeman as he battles against aliens. Its sequel was to be published by Vivendi Universal Games, the video game arm of Vivendi Universal.

A Valve spokeswoman said no release date has been set but the firm expected to complete the game this summer.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Oracle Antitrust Case Opens

Oracle Corp. began a pivotal legal battle Monday by depicting its $7.7 billion takeover bid for rival business software maker PeopleSoft Inc. as a competitive catalyst that will spur Microsoft Corp. and other major players to pounce on new market opportunities.

Oracle attorney Daniel Wall used his 45-minute opening statement in what is expected to be a monthlong antitrust trial to ridicule a government lawsuit seeking to block the proposed takeover as a case built on "anecdotes and vignettes."

U.S. Department of Justice attorney Claude Scott drew a different scenario, promising to prove that a combination between Redwood Shores-based Oracle and Pleasanton-based PeopleSoft would drive up prices in a small segment of

a market that is too complicated for new rivals to enter.

The government's case is built on the premise that Oracle, Peoplesoft and Germany-based SAP have cornered the market on the sophisticated software that the largest U.S. companies rely upon to run their accounting and personnel departments.

Oracle says that definition is far too narrow because it ignores a wide range of niche players eager to fill market voids and the likely entrance of Microsoft, the world's largest software company.

Scott said the government intends to introduce evidence showing Microsoft doesn't plan an aggressive expansion in the business applications software - the computer coding used to automate a wide range of administrative tasks.

Wall scoffed at that notion in his opening statement, saying Microsoft showed its true intentions almost as soon as Oracle launched its bid for PeopleSoft on June 6, 2003. Microsoft began exploring a SAP takeover the day after Oracle jolted the software industry with its PeopleSoft offer, Wall said.

In a statement issued shortly before Monday's trial began, Redmond, Wash.-based Microsoft confirmed that it held merger discussions with SAP "late last year." Microsoft said it called off the talks after concluding the deal was too complex and has no plans to resume negotiations.

Oracle views Microsoft's acknowledged interest in SAP as a coup in its case, theorizing that the talks will help prove the software giant wants a bigger piece of the business applications software pie - a market that has been estimated between $20 billion to $25 billion.

But the government could just as easily cite Microsoft's interest in SAP as proof that even the world's biggest software maker lacks the resources to make a dent in the business applications software market on its own, said Chicago antitrust attorney Nate Eimer. "This (evidence) could backfire on Oracle."

New York attorney Charles Biggio, who formerly worked in the Justice Department's antitrust division, agreed. "It shows Microsoft wanted to do a deal, but maybe the company decided not to try to do it after finding out just how complex the market really is," Biggio said. "A lot is going to depend on how Microsoft testifies in the trial."

Both the Justice Department and Oracle plan to call Microsoft executives to the witness stand during the nonjury trial.

Investors seemed to interpret the Microsoft revelation as a boost for Oracle's case and its $21-per-share takeover bid. Peoplesoft's shares surged $1.15, or 6.6 percent, to close at $18.46 Monday on the Nasdaq Stock Market. PeopleSoft's stock has sagging since the Justice Department and 10 states sued to block the deal in late February, reflecting the market's dimming hopes that Oracle will prevail.

In his opening statement Monday, Scott revealed that the case boils down to about $400 million to $500 million in business applications software sales made to major companies and other large agencies. The government contends this market niche relies on robust competition between Oracle and PeopleSoft to hold down product prices and bolster customer service.

U.S. District Judge Vaughn Walker, a former antitrust lawyer who will decide the case, asked Scott questions that indicated he may be troubled by the government's attempt to confine the market's definition to the United States.

Oracle contends the government has unfairly narrowed the market to lessen the impact of SAP, which is the market leader.

"SAP is everywhere," Wall said in his opening statement. "That is a fatal flaw in (the government's) theory."

The government began calling its witnesses, consisting mostly of software customers, to the stand Monday.

Company Wants Spyware Control Act Blocked

A New York company that makes Internet pop-up ads has asked a judge to block enforcement of Utah's new Spyware Control Act pending resolution of the firm's challenge to the law's constitutionality.

WhenU.com Inc. claims the law that took effect last month is "arbitrary and Draconian" and violates its free-speech rights.

WhenU lawyers told 3rd District Judge Joseph Fratto Jr. on Thursday that regulation of advertising on the Internet is a matter of interstate commerce subject to federal, not state, jurisdiction.

Interrupting an online transaction to direct activities to a competing business "is the activity the Utah Legislature is trying to prohibit," argued attorney Blake Miller, representing the state.

He told Fratto that computer users often are tricked into accepting bait software, or are not fully informed of how it will affect their computer. Later, users find the software difficult to remove.

The state contends that some spyware has malevolent intent and may be used to steal computer users' identities.

WhenU maintains its advertising software, which is used by 21 million people each month, is only installed on computers with users' consent and does not gather private information.

It contends it offers computer users useful free software, such as weather monitors or screen savers, in exchange for allowing a program to be installed that tracks the user's Web browsing habits, then generates - or "pops up" - related ads on the screen. For example, a consumer browsing travel sites might be offered deals on hotels or rental cars.

WhenU chief executive Avi Naidern testified that Utah's law could cause the company irreparable financial damage, not only through its "draconian" $10,000 per violation fines, but by driving away partners and clients out of fear they may be liable for violations of the law.

Two Utah companies, Overstock.com and 1-800 Contacts, contend that WhenU ads inundate their Web sites with competitors' ads, costing them millions.

Microsoft Files Eight New Lawsuits Against Spammers

Microsoft Corp. has filed eight lawsuits against spammers, saying that they deceived consumers and used false information to hide their tracks, the world's largest software maker said on Thursday.

The lawsuits are the latest salvo in the Redmond, Washington-based company's war to eradicate unsolicited emails, which have clogged countless inboxes on personal computers running the Windows operating system.

"These spammers sent millions of emails individually - some hundreds of millions - soliciting a variety of products including body enlargement pills, prescription drugs, dating services, university degree programs and work-at-home and get-rich-quick scheme offers," Microsoft said in a statement.

Microsoft has said it plans to try to eradicate spam by deploying technology, promoting legislation and suing spammers.

Microsoft, which filed its first major lawsuit against spammers last July, says it is pursuing more than 80 lawsuits around the world against senders of unsolicited e-mail. Of those, 51 lawsuits were brought in the United States.

BT Seeks to Block Child Porn Site Access

British Telecommunications PLC said Monday it plans to block its 2.7 million Internet subscribers from reaching child pornography Web sites banned under British law.

The system, named Cleanfeed, was undergoing trials and should be up and running in the next few weeks, retail chief executive Pierre Danon said.

Attempts to reach the sites will result in a "page not found" error message. BT said it will not see details of people trying to reach the sites, or of the sites themselves.

BT spokesman Ross Cook said the technology can block sites by filtering out either specific domain names or the unique numeric addresses associated with the Web server hosting the site. It can also block individual pictures on sites.

The numeric approach can potentially block legitimate sites that share the same hosting company as porn sites. But relying on specific names does little if sites constantly change their Web addresses.

Lists will be supplied by the Internet Watch Foundation, an industry monitoring group, and will be updated frequently. The organization says it will provide listings by domain names based on submissions from Internet users.

Cook said the foundation also would create an appeals process for sites that believe they are wrongly blocked.

BT said it was talking with other service providers interested in buying

the technology, but had no plans to market it commercially.

The company said it had the backing of the British government and police for the project.

Danon said because the system was based on a specific piece of legislation - the 1978 Child Protection Act - there was no risk of creeping censorship. Child porn sites are illegal under British law.

Western governments have grappled with how to block child pornography without resorting to censorship.

In the United States, civil liberties groups have fought Pennsylvania’s attempts to force service providers to block access to child porn sites, saying such efforts also block thousands of legitimate sites.

Some governments have few qualms about restricting access to the Net. In China, government-installed filters bar access to thousands of Web sites abroad run by dissidents, human rights groups and news organizations.

Cyber-Cops Plan to Patrol Internet Chatrooms

Police plan to patrol Internet chatrooms as part of a multinational crackdown on pedophile rings.

They will also seize the finances of Web site operators who peddle child pornography and freeze the credit cards of their customers.

"We want to create the equivalent of a beat cop for the Internet," said the UK’s National Crime Squad Assistant Chief Constable Jim Gamble.

Police from Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia are to form a global taskforce with the primary aim of stopping pedophiles luring children into offline encounters.

"This should not be viewed as a Big Brother tactic - this is about police becoming more visible on the Internet," Gamble told Reuters Wednesday.

Under the plan, an officer would appear in a chat area from time to time to observe conversations and would be identified with a type of "cyber badge" or icon for the "Virtual Global Task Force" to let everyone in the chatroom know, Gamble said.

"We want to give the potential predator the idea that we are present to make them think ’will I loiter here or will I flee from that particular chatroom?"’

The problem of pedophile "grooming" of children in chatrooms has been growing.

Last year, Microsoft’s MSN Web portal shut down chatrooms in nearly every country where it operated, saying they had become a haven for pedophiles and spam-peddlers.

The move was greeted with mixed emotions. Child safety groups welcomed it, but others feared that the criminal element would burrow further underground to prey on victims.

Gamble also said the taskforce would begin working with banks, credit card associations and Internet service providers to identify Web sites that sell access to illegal content, notably child pornography.

The aim is to freeze the assets of these Web site operators. "We are looking to strip the money out of organized crime," he said.

Gamble had no timeframe for when he would like to see the initiative begin.

The National Crime Squad is working, among others, with America's Federal Bureau of Investigation, The Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Australian Federal Police.

Does the Internet Need Its Own Police?

The Internet is a "god-awful mess," but few U.S. government officials are willing to take action against virus writers, spammers, and other scammers, according to author Bruce Sterling. He was speaking at the Gartner IT Security Summit this week in Washington, D.C.

Disorder and corruption are winning on the Internet, and computer users need the U.S. government to crack down on the thieves preying on the Net, said Sterling, author of futuristic novels Heavy Weather and Islands in the Net and the nonfiction book The Hacker Crackdown: Law and Disorder on the Electronic Frontier.

"We had a digital revolution in the 1990s - now we've slid into digital terror," Sterling said during his hour-long critique on the state of cybersecurity. "Today's Internet is a dirty mess - its revolution failed. E-commerce was extremely inventive for a while, but the financing model was corrupt. There was poor governance in the financial systems, there was worse industrial policy; the upshot was a spectacular industry-wrecking boom and bust."

Most of the advancements in Internet commerce since the dot-com bust have been illegal, Sterling noted, including spamming, identity theft, and "phishing," which is theft of credit card numbers or other personal information by directing customers to bogus Web sites to change their account settings. "If you advance into mayhem, that's not advancement, that's driving into a ditch," he added.

Sterling offered what he called a little good news about cybersecurity: the recent arrests of a handful of virus or worm writers, including the arrest in May of the 18-year-old German man who allegedly wrote the Sasser worm. "The world is never going to run out of disaffected teenagers," he said.

But Sterling said he's not overly worried about bored 18-year-old worm writers who are unsophisticated enough to get caught; instead he's concerned about the authors of such malicious code as Slammer, Code Red, and Witty because they haven't been caught.

The authors of the Witty worm targeted users of Internet Security Systems' products, while the Bagel and Mydoom virus authors attempted to turn infected computers into spam-sending machines, Sterling said. "Bagel and Mydoom are the future of virus-writing because they have a business model,"

he said. "Those are organized crime activities.... These are crooks."

Virus and worm writing will grow as a weapon for terrorists and warring nations, Sterling predicted. Terrorists operating in places with little central government control will begin to see cyberterrorism as an effective weapon because of a lack of international cooperation on cybersecurity enforcement, he said. He listed a dozen such countries, including Somalia, Bosnia, and the Philippines.

"This is the birth of a genuine, no-kidding, for-profit... multinational criminal underworld," he said. "I don't see any way it can't happen. We're going to end up getting pushed around by bands of international electronic thieves in a very similar way to the way we've been pushed around by gangs of international Mafia and international Mujahideen terrorists."

The new tools of terrorists and criminals will be "oil, narcotics, guns, and broadband," he said.

With cyberthreats likely to rise, the U.S. government needs to focus on enforcement of existing laws, including antifraud laws, Sterling said. He praised New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, who prosecuted Buffalo spammer Howard Carmack earlier this year, as well as other white-collar criminals. Although virus writers and many spammers break existing laws, most prosecutors seem reluctant to take on computer cases, Sterling said.

"In my opinion, we need a thousand guys like [Spitzer]," Sterling said. "We've got a ridiculous amount of computer laws."

Efforts such as the CAN-SPAM law, passed by Congress in late 2003, are "phoney-baloney gestures," Sterling said.

Instead of weak laws, the U.S. government needs to sponsor a multistate computer-crime task force that enforces existing laws, he said. He also recommended that the government post names of spammers and other Internet scammers on a Web site for everyone to see.

Sterling also praised parts of the National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace, released by the Bush administration in February 2003, calling it "modest and feasible." The document recommended that nations work together to combat cyberthreats, and such cooperation is needed to fight borderless cyberterrorism, Sterling said. But the strategy is likely to go nowhere after former Bush cybersecurity chief Richard Clarke criticized his former boss' counterterrorism efforts in a book released earlier this year, Sterling said.

Spam Hit All-time High in May

Unwanted e-mails, or spam, surged to an all-time high in May representing as much as three-quarters of all e-mail traffic, according to a survey.

The Internet security firm MessageLabs said of some 909 million e-mails scanned at its customers, 691.5 million were intercepted as spam, or 76 percent.

The firm said the percentage of virus-infected e-mails held steady at around 9.1 percent.

"E-mail-borne viruses have plagued businesses for years, whereas spam has become the primary pain point only recently and now far surpasses the number of virus-infected e-mails," said Mark Sunner, chief technology officer at MessageLabs.

"In spite of a convergence of attack techniques, the growth patterns remain different. Spam levels follow a constant upwards curve while viral threats remain steady. The exception is when volumes spike during major outbreaks such as MyDoom or virus wars break out between the authors."

A separate report Monday by Nucleus Research found that the average cost of spam per year per employee more than doubled from the previous year to 1,934 dollars.

That report found the average employee receives nearly 7,500 spam messages per year, up from 3,500 in 2003.

It also found that companies using spam filters report that on average they are able to filter only 20 percent of the incoming spam, down from 26 percent in 2003.

"As spam continues to spiral out of control, so do the associated costs to organizations, and weak legislation has not had a strong impact on reducing the amount of spam clogging inboxes every day," said Rebecca Wettemann, Nucleus Research's vice president for research.

"Filtering technologies are doing their best to lessen the impact ... but the exponential growth of spam limits their effectiveness."

More Junk Mail Violates Spam Law

The federal government's highly touted anti-spam law is being widely disregarded by spammers, according to a new study that shows fewer junk e-mailers are complying with the statute's labeling requirements. Only 1 percent of the unsolicited e-mail messages circulating on the Internet in May complied with the federal Can-Spam Act, despite several high-profile cases in which junk e-mailers have been sued, convicted and sentenced to jail, according to the report released by Denver-based anti-spam company MX Logic.

The figure marks a drop from an average compliance rate of 3 percent during the first four months of the year, the report said.

MX Logic based its conclusions on a random sample of 10,000 spam messages that it examined in each week of May to see if they complied with the law. The Can-Spam Act forbids e-mail marketers from putting false e-mail addresses or names in the "from" subject of their messages, requires that their subject lines say what is in the messages and that they include links that allow recipients to refuse further mailings. Violators can be jailed up to five years and sued for as much as $6 million.

"This is a little surprising to us," said Sheila O'Neill, director of government relations for MX Logic. "We're not sure why [compliance] dropped."

O'Neill speculated that two factors affected the falling percentage of Can-Spam-compliant e-mail: A growing volume of spam coming from non-U.S.

sources and the failure of U.S.-based spammers to take the law seriously.

Other anti-spam companies are seeing a similar trend. Scott Petry, founder and vice president of products and engineering for Redwood City, Calif.-based anti-spam company Postini Inc., said spammers have boosted their e-mail volume in response to the development of better filtering software, though the spam rate has leveled off a bit this year.

Postini, which scans 1.4 billion e-mail messages weekly, reported that spam has accounted for almost 80 percent of all e-mail on the Internet at any given time since January.

That increase has resulted in frustrated e-mail users tired of clearing their in-boxes, as well as soaring costs for businesses. Although individuals cannot sue spammers, Internet service providers and law enforcement authorities have started to take steps to cut down on the onslaught of junk e-mail.

The nation’s four largest ISPs - Earthlink, America Online, Microsoft Corp., and Yahoo Inc. - filed six lawsuits against spammers last March using the Can-Spam Act.

State and local governments also are fighting illegal junk e-mail. In April, the Justice Department filed its first criminal cases under the law. In Buffalo, N.Y., in late May, Erie County, N.Y., Court Judge Michael D’Amico sentenced so-called "Buffalo Spammer" Howard Carmack to 3 1/2 to 7 years in jail for hijacking identities to send out millions of spam messages.

Several states also have passed bills promising fines and jail time for convicted spammers, including Maryland and Virginia. Two suspected spammers are facing charges under Virginia’s law.

Laura Atkins, president of the San Francisco-based SpamCon Foundation, said it would take more than a few lawsuits to scare off the hardcore spammers who are responsible for sending out most unwanted mail. The drop in compliance doesn’t mean that fewer people are complying with the law, just that the worst scofflaws have greatly increased the amount of spam they’re sending out, she added.

"The hardcore, ’we-don’t-care’ spammers are going to do whatever they have to do to send out their mail," Atkins said. "It’s going to take three or four enforcement rounds and people actually ending up in jail before people begin to see that this is really not worth their time."

Sen. Conrad Burns (R-Mont.) who co-authored the Can-Spam law, agreed that more enforcement is needed. "Spammers know their game and they know it well, but now that there is a law in place this lack of compliance is unacceptable. I will continue working to make sure the enforcement of this law does not waver," Burns said.

The MX Logic study found that 15 percent of pornographic spam messages follow a Federal Trade Commission rule requiring subject lines to include the label "SEXUALLY-EXPLICIT."

"A certain segment of the [pornography] industry knows that they’re the first people on the hit list. I think they know they had better cross their t’s and dot their i’s." said MX’s O’Neill.

Allen Hile, assistant director of the FTC’s Division of Marketing

Practices, said that 15 percent is still too low a compliance rate for sexually explicit e-mail.

"[It's] unacceptably low, whether it's 15 percent or 1 percent," Hile said. "I don't think we can take a bow for that. I think it will improve when enforcement cases start running off the assembly line."

Apple Launches Faster Power Mac G5 Computer

Apple Computer Inc. rolled out its fastest-ever desktop computer on Wednesday with processors that run as fast as 2.5 gigahertz, but the company fell short of its earlier goal to offer a 3.0 gigahertz chip-based system by this month.

Apple has been counting on its chip supplier, IBM, to shrink the size of components to permit higher speeds for its microprocessors, the brains that run a computer. As more transistors are fit onto smaller circuits, the speed at which a processor can run increases.

The PowerPC 970FX processor made by International Business Machines Corp. has components that are as little as 90 nanometers across, down from the previous generation of 130 nanometer manufacturing technology. A nanometer is a billionth of a meter.

"We certainly hoped that's where we would be but the entire industry has had a bigger challenge to get to 90 nanometers than people would have liked," said Phil Schiller, head of worldwide product marketing for Apple.

As a result, Apple will not this year sell a Power Mac G5 with microprocessors running at 3.0 gigahertz, or 3 billion cycles a second, he said. "As soon as we can, those systems will be out there," Schiller said.

"It's one of the rare times that IBM has let down a customer," said Richard Doherty, director of The Envisioneering Group in Seaford, New York, adding that the problem was likely that at 3.0 gigahertz, the chips produced too much heat.

When Apple Chief Executive Steve Jobs announced the dual-chip Power Mac G5 last June, he said that Power PC chips, also known as the G5, running at 3.0 gigahertz would be available within 12 months' time.

"We recognize that statement was made a year ago but can't comment on our customers' product and technology plans," said IBM spokesman Chris Andrews. "If you look at the challenges others are facing in the industry with that same transition ... we'd argue that is a very significant performance boost we were able to provide."

"Both for IBM and Intel the move to 90 nanometer has been more difficult and they've been the leaders" in using the latest-generation chip-making technologies, said Nathan Brookwood, an analyst at market research firm Insight 64. "Every time you make these technology transitions it's more difficult than the last time."

In January, the world's largest chipmaker, Intel Corp., said it would delay its new line of microprocessors code-named Dothan by a few months after a validation test had found problems. Intel ultimately rolled out the new chips, an update to its Pentium M line of chips, on May 10.

For IBM’s part, the company had trouble producing enough properly functioning Power PC 970FX chips from a single wafer, a measure known as yield in the industry, Brookwood said. "The company hasn’t been terribly specific other than to say the yields weren’t where they wanted them to be," Brookwood said.

IBM has been losing money in its chip division as it seeks to bring its new $3 billion East Fishkill, New York, plant on line that uses the latest chipmaking technology.

Previously, Cupertino, California-based Apple’s Power Mac models used microprocessors that ran as fast as 2.0 gigahertz. The latest models all use two processors in each computer.

Apple said it expects to ship the 2.5 gigahertz models in July, while versions with two 1.8 gigahertz microprocessors and two 2.0 gigahertz processors are now available.

The 2.5 gigahertz chip is one that Apple is currently selling in a computer server it launched a few months ago.

The company, which earlier this year said it was having problems with its supply of chips from IBM, said it believes it has gotten past those supply challenges and will be able to meet expectations for the new G5.

"We’re feeling very good about our ability to supply that product in July," said Tom Boger, desktop product marketing vice president for Apple.

Apple introduced the system about a year ago and previously the least expensive model had only one 1.6 gigahertz microprocessor. The system prices now start at $1,999 and run to $2,999, while the previous range began at $1,799.

Google Stirs Controversy With Froogle

Google has staked its reputation as the Internet’s premier search engine on delivering rapid, relevant search results - untouched by human hands - that it says are based on complex mathematical formulas and sophisticated technology. But with Father’s Day approaching, Google Inc. is experimenting by promoting its own shopping site ahead of other online search results and ads. That has prompted criticism from some industry experts who say that the giant search engine company appears to be compromising the unusually high standards that it has set for itself just as it prepares to sell stock to the public.

Danny Sullivan, editor of Search Engine Watch, said this was the first time he had noticed Google promoting its shopping service, named Froogle, by placing it at the top of the list of advertiser-supported search results. For example, when computer users typed the phrase "Father’s Day gifts" into Google earlier this week, Froogle often came up as the first listing. Google previously has said its ad rankings were based entirely on formulas combining the prices paid for ads and the popularity of Web sites among searchers.

"It is weird when Google shoves its own stuff in there," Sullivan said. "It is wrong, in that Google has taken a spot an advertiser was expecting to

get. If you are an advertiser, you have a right to be upset. They ought to come up with something better."

Google declined comment about the recent promotion, citing the quiet period companies customarily enter leading up to their initial public offerings of stock. Federal securities laws prohibit companies from saying anything that would hype the offering during the quiet period. Google has recently taken a liberal approach to that directive, talking openly about a number of new product initiatives, though it has been careful to avoid making revenue projections.

In another recent practice that is drawing criticism, Google manually altered the mathematically generated search results for certain products - such as golf clubs - that might typically be purchased as gifts for Father's Day so that the first thing coming up in a search under ads was a link to Froogle. In this case, Google did not identify Froogle by name, choosing instead to label the result under the heading "Product Search Results." Only when users clicked on the link did they find it led to Froogle.

While Google considers this an experiment, some industry analysts said it appears to violate Google's own standards about disclosure and its description of how search results are derived. Andy Beal, vice president of WebSourced Inc., a search engine marketing firm, called Google's practice misleading since it makes it appear that the Froogle link came up because of its relevance, rather than because Google officials decided to list it on the top.

"If Google thinks there is nothing wrong with showing Froogle at the top, why are they not clearly labeling it?" Beal asked. "They should at least have a button that explains what it is and where these results are coming from."

Google's practice contrasts with that of Yahoo Inc. Type "Father's Day" in its search engine, and the first results that come back are labeled "Inside Yahoo" to distinguish them from search results for the rest of the Web.

"Google does hold itself to higher standards, and they are vocal about trying to establish guidelines and standards for others to live by," Beal said. "A case in point was their recent guidelines about software. If Google is going to set the standards, then by Google's own definition, they should have those results labeled as Froogle, and make it clear what those results are for."

Other industry experts said they saw nothing wrong with Google's promotion of Froogle, noting that the company was simply attempting to provide computer users with the most useful links for buying gifts. Fredrick Marckini, chief executive of iProspect.com Inc., a search engine marketing firm, said that with product searches becoming a more important task for search engines, Google is making life easier for online shoppers.

If Google decides to routinely favor Froogle in directing people where to go when they shop, Marckini said online retailers may be forced to take Froogle more seriously, marketing their wares through the service as they do on the search engine. Google allows businesses to list their products for free on Froogle. Google will apparently seek to profit from Froogle, as from its main site, primarily by selling ads.

"They seem to be true to their word. I don't think this is inconsistent with anything they have said," Marckini said of Google. "I think they are

doing it in a clear attempt to improve the value of their search results."

Dennis Pushkin, chief executive of marketing firm MoreVisibility.com Inc., said Google appears to be laying the foundation to ramp up Froogle, which has been in a test phase, and make it an engine of profit. While Google is immensely popular and enormously profitable, its Froogle service is relatively small compared with other Internet sites and search engines specializing in product comparison, Pushkin said.

"This is the next stage of Google, and they are presenting the beginning of Froogle," Pushkin said. "The advertiser in due course is going to have the opportunity to advertise on Froogle."

Scott Kessler, an analyst with Standard & Poor's, said Google needs to develop Froogle and other services if it is to continue growing amid heightened competition. An April survey commissioned by S&P showed that Google remained the undisputed leader in search and that Yahoo was a distant second. Among 1,000 people surveyed, 48 percent said they used Google most, followed by Yahoo (20 percent), MSN (14 percent) and AOL (7 percent). Kessler said that it is likely the gap between Google and the others will narrow and that the leading search engines will increasingly come to resemble one another.

"We think Google will have difficulty replicating Yahoo's success in consumer content and services," Kessler wrote in a new research report. "With Froogle, Google has extended its search capabilities to comparative shopping. But users of Google search somewhat less for information about products and services than those of other major search services. While Froogle is an application, Yahoo offers similar search functionality, as well as browsing capabilities, a shopping marketplace, and payment offerings."

Could Your New PC Be Patchless?

The excitement home buyers feel when taking a new PC out of its box can be short-lived if the machine is vulnerable to the swarm of viruses and worms on the Internet.

One senior administrator at a major research university recently endured a prolonged setup procedure with his new laptop. The administrator, who asked not to be identified due to the visibility of his position, purchased a laptop in May after encountering delays in obtaining the notebook, which was first introduced last March along with Intel's Centrino technology.

After connecting the notebook to the Internet over a dial-up connection, the machine started crashing repeatedly in a sequence that looked eerily familiar to the administrator's experiences with the Blaster worm last August. Sure enough, a Google search quickly confirmed his diagnosis, setting the stage for a two-hour marathon download of Windows Update patches and the Blaster Worm Removal Tool from Symantec.

Current PC users are constantly reminded about the need to download patches and operating system updates as soon as they are made available. But those users may not realize that a "new" PC might actually have been sitting in a warehouse for several months, and might lack the most recent patches required to keep it safe from viruses and worms.

In order to meet delivery deadlines, PCs bound for the retail market must have their operating systems frozen about three to four weeks prior to the date on which they are made available, said Jim Kahler, manager of consumer support for Hewlett-Packard's consumer PCs. With Microsoft releasing several new security updates almost every month, there's no simple way to ensure that when a PC finally makes it to the user, that PC contains the latest updates required to secure the system, he said.

HP advises all purchasers to activate the built-in firewall that comes with Windows XP prior to connecting the machine to the Internet, Kahler said. The next major update to the Windows operating system, Windows XP Service Pack 2, will help improve security by turning the firewall on as the default option on future releases of the operating system.

Toshiba ships every PC with documentation that urges customers to immediately visit the Windows Update Web site and download and install any software patches that the site identifies as missing on that PC, said Carl Pinto, director of product development.

Most of IBM's PC customers are businesses that have an IT staff member who makes sure each PC contains the necessary updates before passing it along to the user, said Clain Anderson, director of marketing for IBM's wireless and security solutions.

IBM can also set up a system that monitors the patch status of an enterprise's network of PCs, automatically downloading updates as they are provided by Microsoft, Anderson said.

Representatives from Dell did not respond to requests for comment. However, Dell doesn't sell its PCs through retail stores, which means it only carries four days of inventory at any one time, according to its financial results presented last month.

The Windows Update feature is only one line of defense against fast-moving worms and viruses. Just about every PC company ships a free trial version of an antivirus product such as Symantec's Norton Antivirus that will help detect viruses and worms.

Besides those two defenses, there's not much the PC industry can do to protect users against worms and viruses other than pleading with them to install Windows Update patches and regularly update their virus definitions, said Stephen Baker, director of industry analysis with NPD Techworld in Reston, Virginia.

Unlike other electronic devices that consumers are used to owning, such as televisions, PCs require regular maintenance and a willingness to cede control of the update process to a vendor, Baker said.

"You have a lot more responsibility as a PC owner to maintain and take care of your device than you do as a television owner," Baker said.

Virus-infected PCs aren't just problematic for their users. They are often used as spam relays or to launch other virus and worm attacks, making it essential that all PC users patch their systems, Baker said.

The university administrator eventually discovered a guide called "Windows XP: Surviving the first 24 hours" on the interesting-people.org mailing list maintained by Dave Farber of Carnegie Mellon University that would have provided tips such as turning on the firewall and manually checking for updates.

The episode turned out to be nothing more than an evening of aggravation, but it could have been avoided with clearer instructions on how to safely break in a new PC, the administrator said.

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